

## *ВСЛУШИВАНИЕ, ЯЗЫК, МОЛЧАНИЕ*

### *LISTENING, LANGUAGE, SILENCE*

<https://doi.org/10.21638/2226-5260-2021-10-1-212-231>

#### LISTENING: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PATH TOWARDS LETTING THINGS BE\*

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The Western philosophical and scientific tradition was and still is based on rationalism, objectivity, truths that are all sought from the ocularcentric paradigm. Many thinkers, however, have been recognising this perspective to be exclusive towards the other senses, and therefore insufficient. Listening, as enabled by the auditory sense, has a potential for revealing a deeper sense of being in the world. In this article listening is presented as a possible way towards inhabiting our life-world and nonetheless “to let things be.” In order to do so, an interdisciplinary approach of research is adopted. First, the author offers some perspectives from the field of the ethics of listening, where the thoughts of Lisbeth Lipari, Luce Irigaray and others expose listening as an intersubjective gesture of encounter with the other in acceptance. Through his philosophy of listening, Jean-Luc Nancy, one of the crucial voices in this study, offers an explication of how listening can be the force of liberating sense and senses. Further on, an account on auditory phenomenology is offered, combining it with and stressing the importance of Husserl’s under-

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\* This article was made possible by the financial support of the Slovenian Research Agency in the frames of the research project *Surviving the Anthropocene through Inventing New Ecological Justice and Biosocial Philosophical Literacy* (ARRS research project J7-1824), of the research programme *Liminal spaces: areas of cultural and societal cohabitation in the age of risk and vulnerability* (ARRS research programme P6-0279) and of the bilateral research project *Listening and Poliphony: Echoes of Phenomenology, Ethics and Anthropology* (BI-LV/20-22-006).

standing of intersubjectivity. These perspectives are then enriched with echoes from acoustic ecology and its experiences of listening to the environment. The reverberations of multiple voices presented in this text allow for an understanding of listening as an intersubjective and mutually constitutive activity. As such, it involves a liberation of sense and allows for an openness to being and beings.

*Keywords:* listening, ethics of listening, Jean-Luc Nancy, auditory phenomenology, acoustic ecology, intersubjectivity, phenomenology of sound, silence.

## ВСЛУШИВАНИЕ: МЕЖДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫЙ СПОСОБ ПОЗВОЛИТЬ ВЕЩАМ БЫТЬ\*

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Западная философская и научная традиция была (и все еще остается) основана на рационализме, объективности и на истинах, искомых на основании чисто визуальной парадигмы. Однако многие мыслители признавали, что подобная точка отсчета дискриминирует другие чувства, а значит, является недостаточной, неудовлетворительной. Способность слушать, опирающаяся на другое чувство — чувство слуха, — обладает определенным потенциалом, позволяющим лучше раскрыть более глубокий смысл бытия в мире. В данной статье способность слушать представлена как возможный путь к тому, чтобы обитать в жизненном мире и, вместе с тем, «позволить вещам быть». С этой целью в статье применяется междисциплинарный подход. Прежде всего, автор предлагает взглянуть на проблему с точки зрения этики слушания; обращаясь к мысли Лисбет Липари, Люс Иригарей и др., можно убедиться в том, что слушание есть intersубъективный жест встречи с другим в признании и принятии другого. В своей философии вслушивания Жан-Люк Нанси, одна из ключевых фигур в данном исследовании, предлагает свое объяснение того, каким образом слушание может быть фактором, высвобождающим смысл и чувства. Далее автор предлагает свой вариант феноменологии слушания, сочетая его с важной для данной темы концепцией intersубъективности Гуссерля. Эти рассуждения обогащаются отголосками акустической экологии с ее опытом слышания окружающей среды. Резонанс многоголосия, представленного в данном тексте, позволяет понять слушание как intersубъективную и взаимно конституирующую деятельность. В связи с этим оно позволяет высвободить смысл и обеспечивает открытость бытию и сущему.

*Ключевые слова:* слушание, этика вслушивания, Жан-Люк Нанси, акустическая феноменология, акустическая экология, intersубъективность, феноменология звука, тишина.

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\* Статья опубликована благодаря финансовой поддержке Словенского исследовательского учреждения в рамках исследовательского проекта «Пережить антропоцен через изобретение новой экологической справедливости и биосоциальной философской грамотности» (Исследовательский проект ARRS J7-1824), исследовательской программы «Пределы пространства: области культурного и социального существования в эпоху риска и уязвимости» (Исследовательская программа ARRS P6-0279) и двустороннего исследовательского проекта «Слушание и полифония: отголоски феноменологии, этики и антропологии» (BI-LV / 20-22-006).

In the following pages I will try to open a space of reflection on the possible ways in which listening can contribute to discovering new and rediscovering old paths towards an attitude of “letting things be,” starting with voices from the field of the ethics of listening. These tell us about the role of listening in establishing intersubjective relationships and in allowing the meeting with others in acceptance. Another perspective will be borrowed from the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) who in his essay *Listening* asks if philosophy is still able to listen, since it seems that listening was substituted by understanding, giving precedence to seeing. Listening as activity and intersubjective gesture was often neglected, not emphasised. Focusing on it, listening could shake the foundations of philosophical and scientific discoveries and unchangeable truths, mainly with its questioning of the roles of object and subject, and through a renewed and different establishment of subjectivity. Through Nancy’s philosophy of listening we will be able to hear echoes of new possible encounters in the inhabiting our life-worlds, that would give precedence to sensing the becoming rather than to a fixed meaning.

Adrienne Janus (2011) in her study about the “anti-ocular” turn in continental philosophy, assesses Jean-Luc Nancy as a “culminating figure” in reasserting the dominance of the visual paradigm. As she exposes in describing its critique, in this turning away from the visual there is

not an awareness of the possibilities opened up by the turn towards listening as a mode of attending to the multiple resonances of sense—where “sense” touches upon, and resonates with, all registers of sensual perception as well as intellectual conception, where touch, taste, smell, and sight, affect and idea, insofar as they resonate, can be listened to. (Janus, 2011, 183)

Acknowledging this note, the present article will try to remedy this lack of awareness in attempting to show, with the help of Jean-Luc Nancy and other thinkers, how listening can not only be a central stance or activity towards the world and things in it as they are, but also, provide a solid ground for ethical conduct in the sense “to let things be!”<sup>1</sup>.

After an account on the ethics of listening and a presentation of Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of listening, I will offer insight into the field of auditory phenomenology and phenomenologies of sound arts that follow the phenomenological traditions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. However, innovative approaches can also

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<sup>1</sup> A similar attempt to show the role of listening and its ethics in the realm of interreligious dialogue was presented by the author of the article “Listening to Otherness: The Case of the Turkish Alevi” (Bjelica, 2020).

be found in their explications of listening and sound that are revealing for the studied field of audition.

These voices will be listened to in an interdisciplinary dialogue and enriched further with those from acoustic ecology. Echoes of these dialogues will offer some possibilities regarding how listening can provide a direction, a sense, for us as listening subjects to inhabit this life-world remaining open to being, beings, and letting them be.

### 1. ENCOUNTERS IN LISTENING

Even if traditionally in the Western world listening is regarded mainly as passive, it is possible to state that in the eyes of the contemporary research, listening constitutes one of the most complex human processes. It plays a crucial role in rhetoric and communication and contributes to more effective, attentive, and ethical deeds.

From the point of view of ethical conduct and of the prompting of intersubjective relations, that is, relations in which nobody is treated as an object, but everybody is considered as one of the possible subjects, the ethical gesture of listening is not considered properly. The contributions to the journal *The International Journal of Listening* illustrate this as they are mainly devoted to the scientific discussion of listening in a variety of contexts, based on various methodologies (empirical, pedagogical, philosophical, historical), but reveal a lack of connections between listening and ethics: they limit the understanding of listening to a set of voluntary and conscious behavioural patterns that unfold in oral or non-verbal communication (Beard, 2009, 7–8). These researches consider a so called “social-cognitive” model that presumes a “relative stable subjectivity, a stable *listening self* composed of skills and cognitive schemas” (Beard, 2009, 8). This assumption of a stable subject is problematic in attempting to connect listening and ethics, as in the ethics of listening the subject is not separated from listening. Rather, in ethics, the subject is understood as constituted with listening, the listening subject being the ethical subject (Beard, 2009, 8–9).

It is crucial to consider the constitutive process of the subject of ethics of listening, which can shed some light on its position in the frames and connection of social relations (Beard, 2009, 10). The ethical subject of listening is always under the influence of soundscapes, music and media, to which the listener is daily exposed, since listening is an unavoidable sense (Beard, 2009, 11, 13). The ear is always active and awake, which allows the subject a certain freedom of choice of proper listening praxis and of ethical becoming. David Beard lists among the decisions for ethical listening the choices to listen individually, to listen selectively, to choose not to listen (denying

attention to unethical communication), to listen together and to listen to each other (Beard, 2009, 18–19).

Camilla A.-L. Koskinen and Unni Å. Lindström (2013) in their article on listening to the otherness of the other emphasise the importance of hermeneutic reading of Levinas' texts for the ethics of listening, which is always about exposing the listener as vulnerable—and this could be recognised as an echo of Levinas' ethics of responsibility. Even though Levinas did not explicitly write about listening or its ethics, the need and presumption of listening can be recognised in his descriptions of responsibility to the other and the appeal to respond to the other's call. The other, an absolutely unknown being and at the same time sovereign, calls and commits to responsibility, mainly through the nudity of the face, its exposure and vulnerability. "Listening entails allowing oneself to see and be moved by the nakedness, vulnerability and holiness of the face, which elicits compassion and responsibility" (Koskinen & Lindström, 2013, 152).

According to Levinas (1979), human responsibility is given *a priori*, as an infinite duty to the (human) being to question ourselves; this responsibility also includes the responsibility for the responsibility of the other, which the philosopher does not perceive as a limitation; on the contrary: this responsibility makes us human and as such it is liberating and constitutive.

The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me by its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. [This] does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness. The order of responsibility [...] is also the order where freedom is ineluctably invoked. (Levinas, 1979, 200)

The fact that we cannot be deaf to the call of the other includes an assumption of listening, the possibility of hearing that we cannot avoid, which makes humanity ethical, as it is always faced with deciding on the response to what is listened to, heard.

The ethical act of listening always involves openness to the radical other, and a caring response is always primarily receptive and less projective. Difference constantly reminds us that our idea of reality is not the final, nor the only one. At the same time we must be conscious of the fact that it is behaviour, understanding, language, and beliefs that prevent attentive listening and are thus an obstacle to ethics, making it selective and exclusive; that is, it does not take into account what we do not understand.

Lisbeth Lipari (2009) advocates a different listening, a "listening otherwise," that focuses on providing attention, mindfulness, and patient awareness. This listening shifts the relationship beyond linguistic schemes and categories, which always already

mark any conceptual thought, leading to separation and objectification. It is therefore necessary to focus on conscious attention, which gives space to the unknown, the unthinkable, the unforeseen, otherness.

For it is only when we *listen otherwise* to the unknown and unrecognizable face of alterity that [...] we may shed, like a snakeskin, our old views and certainties about the world. (Lipari, 2009, 56)

Similarly, Luce Irigaray in her work *I Love to You* (1996, 44–46) also emphasises the importance of listening for communication as an intersubjective exchange. It should be based on mutual listening, which helps to respect the other, their experience, as this opens up the field of communication. This, however, is impossible with established hierarchical discourse: meanings must be exchanged horizontally, which contributes to the intersubjective opening of the present to the construction of the future.

In order to be able to open this field of communication that recognises horizontal transcendence, it is necessary to develop an “I don’t know you” attitude towards the other, which raises awareness about perception, attention, attempting to understand and hear, freedom, openness, and the unexpected. Only the awareness of not knowing the other can lead to the tendency to listen and pay attention to the other person who transcends us. “Listening to you” requires the abandonment of one’s own commitments and obligations, thus enabling attention for others, which is otherwise only partial or insincere (Irigaray, 1996, 116–118). “*I am listening to you* is to listen to your words as something unique, irreducible, especially to my own, as something new, as yet unknown” (Irigaray, 1996, 116).

In her critique of Western culture Irigaray (2008) notes the supremacy of looking over listening in the tradition. She recognises this state mainly in the field of education, teaching and learning, which is often reduced to teacher’s transmission of the inherited and constructed world, conceived as the only true and possible world, to the student. The supposition of only one available world coinciding with the truth is invalid, since it prevents respect for different truths. Instead, Irigaray (2008, 232) suggests an inversion of the privilege of looking to listening, where the priority would be listening to the ways of examination and construction of the truth of the other.

Irigaray is surely not the only one to recognise the primacy of sight over listening among the senses in the culture of our tradition. Martin Jay (1994), for example, surveys the many ways in which French thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century denigrate the visual, which he calls the anti-ocular turn, and even names the thinkers adopting it as followers of anti-phallogocentrism (Jay, 1994, 493). As Janus (2011, 184) points

out, however, not many of these critical thinkers would advocate changing direction: along with Irigaray, Jean-Luc Nancy is a rare philosopher advocating for primacy of listening to allow for a liberation of meaning, senses, and sense. With it, through listening, the subject is constituted and allows for the unknown to be constantly coming through reverberation—and becoming through their meeting in listening.

## 2. LISTENING AS LIBERATION OF SENSE

In his essay *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) asks, among other things, whether philosophy is still capable of listening at all, as he suspects that it has long since been replaced by understanding. It is supposed to be characteristic of a philosopher to neutralise listening within oneself, so that one can philosophise at all based on what is heard and understood. Nancy warns that the dichotomous perception of understanding and listening does not hold up, as they are in fact complementary to each other. It can be said that avoiding guessing about what is heard is understandable from the point of view of the security that philosophers can gain from always understood and unchanging truths, as for them these represent a task successfully accomplished. The author presents the dichotomisation of sight and hearing in a similar way. But even in this case, he claims that visually and aurally they are not mutually exclusive, that they are mutually complementary dimensions of cognition, of knowing. Nevertheless, philosophy, especially phenomenology, says Nancy, focused primarily on “appearance,” that is, the visible. And yet it is more appropriate to listen to the truth than to see it. Listening encourages attention, vigilance, and caution, so it is somewhat unusual that in the Greek world intelligibility and theory were associated exclusively with seeing. With the look, the subject refers to what is seen as an object, and returning to oneself is no exception, which means that when looking, the subject is self-objectifying. Comparing the visual, the pictorial, the imaginary on the one hand, and the auditory, the sonorous, the symbolic on the other, also leads to the difference between visual *mimesis* and auditory *methexis*: in ancient Greek the former term meant imitation and depiction of the real, while the latter, determining essentially the dimension of hearing and the activity of listening, denoted cooperation, sharing, and contagiousness. The author acknowledges that this kind of comparison is primarily an empirical, experiential statement, which is not theoretically justified, but while being aware of the risks of cultural and individual relativism, he perceives it as a kind of experiential challenge. At the same time, he reveals that “relativism” is actually the empirical material that, nevertheless, is the condition for the possibility for “feelings,” “perception” and “culture,” as they refer to each other, relate to each other:



The difference between cultures, the difference between the arts, and the difference between the senses are the conditions, and not the limitations, of experience in general, just as the mutual intricacy of these differences is, as well. (Nancy, 2007, 11)

Listening is, according to the philosopher, a privileged act or state precisely because both meaning and sound resonate in each other, they can interpret, complement and enrich each other. Moreover, because of this mutual connection, the peculiarity of listening is its liminality: it is always situated on the edge of the meaning, of sense, determined by the sound that is to be listened to as an echo of meaning.

Nancy argues that listening is always “straining toward or in an approach to the self” (Nancy, 2007, 9) or the structure of the self, as listening is a form of “infinite referral.” Listening is to be understood as a search for the subject, an attempt of its identification, a recognition of the same and the other of oneself, as sound is constantly returning, referring to and addressing, and in this way it *means* and *makes sense*. The unfolding of the subject does not happen as a given substance, but above all as a *return, echoing* in oneself.

This understanding of listening is crucial mainly because it does not allow the objectification of the subject, nor any determination of the latter; this does not mean that the subject is unknowable—it can be discovered through relating, especially in relation to self-referring, returning to oneself. The meeting of the self in relation thus takes place in presence, the presence of something in the present, but always as coming, passing, expanding, and penetrating. This present of sound is not placed in philosophical-scientific linear time, but is an opening present, “present in waves on a swell” (Nancy, 2007, 13). In these, time opens up, expands, ramifies, envelops, loops. In this time, the sound does not *appear*, but at the same time it does not have a hidden face, it is always integral in its phenomenality and persists in itself, in all its expansiveness.

To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, *at the same time*, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a “self” can take place. To be listening is to be *at the same time* outside and inside, to be open *from* without and *from* within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (*aesthetic*) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion. (Nancy, 2007, 14)

Sound is thus ubiquitous and omnipresent, its dynamics being reflected in its coming and going. The sound is present with its own opening and listening takes place with it—it is impossible not to listen when it is present; the ears do not have “earlids.” Sound presence is created from complex returning, from transmitting and



receiving, it can be perceived both as movable and as simultaneous, vibrating between the source and the perceiving ear, sounding between one and the other, creating space, space of presence, attendance.

Listening can be perceived as opening to resonance, argues Nancy (2007, 25–27), to echoing, reverberation, which is at the same time opening to the self and to oneself, and at the same time gaining and giving sense<sup>2</sup>. The listener is exposed to sense, meaning, directionality, when opened in silence, where the ear stretches, and this tension of the ear already carries its sense. Listening, especially listening to music, means intensifying the auditory sense, because while listening, the self is also listened to.

One could argue that this kind of understanding of listening in a way liberates sense, frees meaning that is all too often fixed, enthroned within the framework of the hegemonic philosophical and scientific, mostly Western, tradition of reason and concurring ultimate truths. Such listening, however, is not limited to musical sonority, even though Nancy focuses predominantly on the latter. Namely, the author (Nancy, 2007, 35–37) understands it as listening in general; he also connects it with speech and dialogue, which is especially important for enabling mutual understanding. Listening beyond meaning allows for a plurality of possible meanings. By listening to oneself, the self can find its self, but simultaneously it is already moving away from the self, even before hearing, before understanding, and in this way one is a subject to oneself.

### 3. PHENOMENOLOGIES: SOUND, INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND LISTENING

In phenomenology, sound is understood as an intentional and temporal object, therefore interpreted in connections to the life-world and to the common intersubjective world (Kivle, 2018, 368). As Ineta Kivle clearly explains and synthesises, there are two principles that are at the base of understanding the auditory phenomena from the hermeneutical and phenomenological stances, inherited by two major figures in phenomenology, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Husserl's call of returning "Back to things themselves!" gives an opportunity to discover things as they are through the gesture of phenomenological reduction, *epoché*<sup>3</sup>, which allows

<sup>2</sup> In Nancy's thought (Nancy, 2007, 29–30) it is therefore possible to recognise the belief that the possibility of meaning is embodied by the possibility of resonance, which is sonority itself. Sense is the rebound of sound, thus being present, opening as perceptible. Sense consists in listening, it reaches us before leaving, even if it is the leaving of sound that enables the actual perception of sense.

<sup>3</sup> *Epoché* (ἐπὶχρή), is a phenomenological method that uses "bracketing," the setting aside of the objective world, since the latter is fundamentally not given *a priori*. "The epoche can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own

the world to present itself as it is. Heidegger's approach of "letting be" encourages an account on auditory phenomena in all their variety, whatever is perceived or understood as sound, sonority (Kivle, 2018, 369). Moreover, Kivle points out that listening in Heidegger's philosophy represents a mode of being open to being itself: "Heidegger's philosophical meditation on the *worldliness of world* enables understanding of the human being as being determined [...] by openness to being and *listening in*" (Kivle, 2018, 368).

Don Ihde as well, in establishing phenomenologies of sound, derives his thoughts from Husserl's and Heidegger's methods. Ihde claims that the research of sound starts with phenomenology, which is a simple task since it is based on someone's own experience. However, he stresses its difficulty, which emerges when one's own experience is an obstacle to perceiving, encountering things, events, sounds as they are. A useful tool for this is the "first phenomenology" established by Husserl that represents a prototype for the science of experience, where self-evident beliefs are deconstructed and further on a reconstruction of language and perspective occurs. This process is enabled by *epoché*, phenomenological reduction, and *bracketing*, all introduced by Husserl. The "second phenomenology," produced by Heidegger that implicitly follows Husserl's steps, however, widens the return to things themselves to a foundational ontology of Being through a hermeneutical approach and existential philosophy (Ihde, 2007, 17–19).

Ihde (2007) proposes a phenomenology of listening in which he concentrates on the phenomenologies of music listening, but also touches upon phenomenology of sound and perception. He notes that studies on hearing and listening experience are uncommon in philosophical thought. One of the reasons he identifies for this is the rare usage of visual metaphors that cover the phenomenon itself and thus create

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pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me" (Husserl, 1960 [1931], 21). This entails that every doubt, every thought, every perception of the world presupposes the existence of the self, which in this case is the first absolutely solid cognitive basis (Husserl, 1960, 23), and everything else is not. For it, it is necessary to undergo transcendental phenomenological reduction, *ἐπὶ νύχθ*, is therefore "bracketing," a fundamental phenomenological method (Husserl, 1960, 21). With it, the self is reduced to the realm of transcendental-phenomenological self-experience, from which the world draws meaning that is knowable only in relation to the self and to which therefore transcendence can be attributed (Husserl, 1960, 26). When subjected to the phenomenological *ἐπὶ νύχθ*, the perception of the self does not change; the self, Ego, still receives conscious experiences that, as consciousness of something, are always intentional. With an insight into one's own perception of objects and the environment, one's own consciousness also becomes intentional on the basis of self-reflection — the consciousness of consciousness, which transforms perception into objects with awareness of perception (Husserl, 1960, 32–33).

a tradition of interpretation. Ihde notes that the language on sound and listening experience remains visual, alluding to the traditional description of musical elements. He admits that spatial metaphors are basically unavoidable; however, the shift in “perspective” should be encouraged. With an intention to remove the presuppositions, the phenomenological reduction can be used to clear the field for perceiving the auditory phenomena as they are, without diminishing the experience of them. With bracketing (Husserl) or hermeneutical reading (Heidegger) of auditory phenomena, one can avoid their conventional reading; i.e., the “natural approach” that puts phenomena in conceptual schemes and attributes to them ordinary commentaries (Ihde, 2007, 218–220).

Similarly, the sound artist Salomé Voegelin, who dedicates her book *Listening to Noise and Silence* (2010) to the philosophy of sound art, also notes the differences in the visual and listening approaches to the life-world<sup>4</sup>. In the visual approach the need for stability and knowability of the object is present, but in listening one strives to set aside expectations of the *a priori* in order to discover and generate the heard (Voegelin, 2010, 4). The author explores listening as an act of engaging with the world, by which the self and the world are constituted, and this double constitution is being determined by the sensorial mode of that engagement. This resonates with *listening in* as openness to being, that which Heidegger was exposing.

Maybe this is the reason that both Voegelin and Ihde state that Husserl’s approach is too visual for an appropriate sound phenomenology, since his metaphors derive from the visible. Heidegger instead can focus on listening and hearing, which approximates him to the ephemerality of auditory phenomena. For Ihde (2007, 21), Husserl adopts a critical stance towards Cartesianism but does not exit its language. However, Janus points out that Heidegger is also nonetheless still hostage to logocentrism (Janus, 2011, 187n6). A preference for Heideggerian second phenomenology might seem very reasonable from the perspective of phenomenology of music

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<sup>4</sup> Here, life-world is not always necessarily conceptualised in Husserl’s manner. Namely, Husserl understands the life-world, „*Umwelt*“, as the surrounding world or even environment, conceived as a world of meaningful entities to the transcendental ego. These exercise on us a motivating force for the ego to ascribe them significance and meaning through intentional consciousness and intersubjective processes (Beyer, 2013). Each person is establishing or living in their own life-world, as their concrete surrounding. A mutual life-world is established through intersubjectivity and is therefore prone to change and is disclosed to us in its transcendental sense in its full concreteness (cf. Husserl, 1960, 133–136). Salomé Voegelin adopts the usage of the term “life-world” from the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, where “life-world” is created with subjects “being in it, and which in turn creates one’s self as an intersubjective subject continually at the moment of this interaction” (Voegelin, 2010, 191 n2).

and music listening, however, for a phenomenology of listening as engaging with the world, it is to be said that an important role might be discovered in Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity—for the latter seems not to be considered fully by the two authors.

Edmund Husserl conceived the concept of intersubjectivity in his *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1960 [1931]), in which, following the example of Descartes' *Meditations*, he seeks to find new foundations of sciences. These again, as in the time of Descartes, strayed from the field of the scientific because of their fragmentation, presumption of validity, and inauthenticity, and that prompted the philosopher to call for a reversal from naive objectivism to transcendental subjectivism (Husserl, 1960, 1–5). In doing so, Husserl states that Descartes overlooked the fact that his "*I think*" as the subject and foundation of cognition must be essentially established as intentional consciousness and therefore transcendental (Husserl, 1960, 22–23).

Husserl parts from the Cartesian "thinking self" to centre his phenomenology into the transcendental self, which in itself is constantly constituted as being, by perceiving itself as the self that experiences, experiences something, while performing a synthesis of everything experienced in its own consciousness. Every conceivable being and imaginable sense falls into the realm of transcendental subjectivity, which is, being the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being, a unique absolute concretion. Husserl argues that the world is intersubjectively constituted in the self-interpretation according to which the transcendently constituted other selves and the objective world common to all are located in the self (Husserl, 1960, 84).

Based on one's own experience of the world and with the help of association, the self can interpret the perception of the other as the other self, but the latter, based on the perception and reflection of the self, is also present in that self—according to this constitutive structure, the first self is constituting for the second self, even if it is a separate subjectivity. In this kind of constituting that is taking place in the self of the other as well, the selves are mutually constituted and are thus establishing intersubjectively the objectivity of the world, which is always immanently transcendental—it stays in the realm of transcendental subjectivity or intersubjectivity.

The endless openness, the infinite possibilities of this intersubjectivity suggest the possibility of relationships and thus the world being established in many ways that can be more correct, better, more proper, less correct, worse, or less attentive. However, each self as a subjectivity has a significant impact on this process of world establishment, as being part of the constituting intersubjectivity. Husserl's substantiation of the objectivity of the world on the basis of intersubjectivity is therefore not important (merely) for the sake of showing possible epistemologically valid paths that sciences can take in finding stronger foundations; but also (and above all) for estab-

lishing intersubjectivity as a relationship between self-perceived subjects that through their intentionalities and by means of reflection can always influence each other: they are reciprocal in their mutual constitution.

Such an understanding of intersubjectivity is more than relevant for the revelation of a phenomenology of listening—as engagement with the world being constituted intersubjectively. It is interesting that Voegelin does not refer to Husserl in acknowledging the intersubjective nature of listening, even if she affirmatively turns in this direction.

Sound does not describe but produces the object/phenomenon under consideration. It shares nothing of the totalizing ability of the visual. [...] The sonic reality is intersubjective in that it does not exist without my being in it and I in turn only exist in my complicity with it; and it is generative in that it *is* the sensory-motor process of listening. (Voegelin, 2010, 10)

Further on she exposes the listening subject, engaged in a listening that is fundamentally innovative, since it produces the world for itself through phenomenological action, intentionality towards the heard, as being part of the listened to in their reciprocal intersubjectivity. Moreover, her account on producing the objective through the intersubjective relationship also seems to fit Husserl's account on the objectivity of the world being located in the transcendental subjectivity.

Sound invites the body into experience and reciprocally makes the object physical. Listening to sound is where objectivity and subjectivity meet: in the experience of our own generative perception we produce the objectivity from our subjective and particular position of listening, which in its turn is constituted by the objectivity of the object as a prior moment of hearing, subjective and particular. (Voegelin, 2010, 15)

Voegelin states that the listener “needs to hear and hear again, to know himself as an intersubjective being in a sonic life-world” (Voegelin, 2010, 10). The omnipresence of sound and the listeners' inability to escape it generate the complex unity of the sonic life-world. The object of listening is thus dynamic, fluid, ephemeral (Voegelin, 2010, 11–12). This means that the whole dynamic process of listening is (highly) collaborative: the listening subject is being constituted intersubjectively by the subject and/or object listened to. It is a kind of phenomenological intersubjectivity through which the two subjects are co-constituted by one another. Leaving the subject/object listened to open, fluid, it allows subjectivity itself—listening might allow the object to become a subject through the reciprocal intersubjective constitution. Therefore, it is crucial to take Husserl's intersubjectivity into account while looking for possible ways of “letting be.”

For the phenomenologies of auditory experiences, therefore, both Husserl's and Heidegger's approaches to life-world and subjectivity constitution are important<sup>5</sup>. Kivle stresses the value of the nature of their philosophies as being tolerant and empathetic, which offers an environment of listening, that allows to be.

They acknowledge a special philosophical environment of listening to thoughts and things, understanding of one's inner self, and contemplation of the world. Such an approach gives an impulse for philosophical interpretations of the environment, which can be regarded as an intentional and meaningful realm of activity or as a permission to be. (Kivle, 2018, 369)

In these environments—"territories," as she puts it—having their rhythms, circumstances and activities, the self, human, constitutes related spheres of sonority, visibility, sensitivity, and understanding. "Such dimensions as seeing and hearing, sonority and silence, speaking and listening, and understanding and reflection penetrate into any meaningful world of human life" (Kivle, 2018, 370).

The phenomenologies of listening presented here, with their understanding of listening as engaging with the world and being intersubjective at its core, are crucial for discovering possible ways of "letting be" not only in the realm of the inter-human, but also on the level of inter-being and even in the fields of inter-material, including all the objects, materials, environments, and habitats of the world.

#### 4. LISTENING TO A SENSED WORLD

Listening as a mode of engaging with the world is important for the development of a caring and respectful relationship of human beings towards the environment. Almost two decades ago Richard James Oddie (2001, 8), a phenomenologist and sound-artist, was stressing the ethical message of environmentalism, encouraging sensitive listening to the others, those marginalised, that allows for an ethical practice.

Oddie, interestingly, identified parallels between Heidegger's ecological philosophy and acoustic ecology, one of their heralds being the Canadian composer R. Mur-

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that they are the only ones. The present article takes these two philosophers into account mainly because of their established role in auditory phenomenology and also to show the forgotten significance of Husserl's intersubjectivity for his field of research. Of course, several reinterpretations and critiques of intersubjectivity have emerged, such as that of Alfred Schutz. Moreover, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer who pointed out that as to the field of the phenomenology of listening and auditory phenomenology, other phenomenologists should be considered, such as Jan-Luc Marion and his phenomenology of givennes. Unfortunately, such a widened inquiry would exceed the scope of this article.



ray Schafer. The latter explains that sound affects the experience and understanding of the world and that the environment and the human are interdependent. (cf. Schafer, 1994) Oddie realises that both Heidegger and Schafer provide a critique of the modern society on the problematic ground of technology, individualism, and anthropocentrism. Moreover, they both call for an attitude to “let the phenomena of the world speak for themselves...” (Oddie, 2001, 8).

However, Oddie stresses an important gesture of Schafer’s acoustic ecology, which is opposing the harmony of nature and the dissonances of the modern culture. Its dualistic rhetoric reinforces the essentialistic opposition and represents an obstacle to a responsible relationship towards the environment and the understanding that nature is continuously reinterpreted and redefined, since cohabitation is crucial to existence. Hence, Oddie calls for a “listening without boundaries” and following the echo of (Heidegger’s) environmental phenomenology that emphasises the co-dependency of the human and the environment, the culture depending on nature but at the same time having its own crucial effects on it (Oddie, 2001, 12).

Some time has passed since Oddie’s suggestions about acoustic ecology so that we may draw from environmental phenomenology and many researchers’, artists’, listeners’ experiences widened through science and reflection. Gordon Hempton, an acoustic ecologist who travelled through the United States of America in search for silence, describing this experience in his book *One Square Inch of Silence*, seems to understand the complementarity of culture and nature, their interdependency, as he states:

Silence nurtures our nature, our human nature, and lets us know who we are. Left with a more receptive mind and a more attuned ear, we become better listeners not only to nature but to each other. (Hempton & Grossmann, 2009, 14)

Hampton has been a listener, a sound collector, for over 30 years and the main intent to his collecting is to save silence, which represents for him an awakening joy. He also hopes to suffuse with this enthusiasm the public, through his publications and recordings. Unanimously with many others, he points to the fact that we have “reached a time in human history when our global environmental crisis requires that we make permanent life-style changes.” He notes that before the human noises there were only sounds of the natural world to which our ears were perfectly attuned, but now that is not the case anymore. That is why he claims that “we need to fall back in love with the land. Silence is our meeting place” (Hempton & Grossmann, 2009, 13). Listening quietly, to the environment, to sounds of nature allows us to receive any meaning and senses we may. This is another case of how listening



remains a fluid engagement with the world, keeping the encounter open, undefined, in the becoming.

Another important observation that Hempton makes is that of how listening to the environment affects the listener. “To be a listener requires a certain willingness to become changed by what you have not yet heard” (Hempton & Grossmann, 2009, 57). The author explains that every environment with its structures and shapes modifies the sound waves that travel through it, by absorbing it, reflecting it, echoing. The environmental topography and atmospheric conditions, the noises, are changed into tunes (Hempton & Grossmann, 2009, 38). This change and offering of sounds from the environment can deeply affect the listener, helping her to rethink her role and impact on the environment itself, and experience a change in the perspective of being in the world.

A whole-valley listening experience is the result of *place*, not an individual performer. I can feel the importance of the living community, how one thing is not more important than the other. It's *everything* that matters. When listening to this music of place [...] I am inspired to be a better neighbor, a better parent, a better child because I feel part of something much bigger: a collective place that makes music and sings to me. (Hempton & Grossmann, 2009, 38)

Listening to the life-world one inhabits can inspire letting it be, allowing for it to have its own life, being, without the need for it to be in service to the human. Research in acoustic ecology can help to reveal new paths of understanding the environment, the world, as a separate but co-dependent intersubjective entity. Moreover, it can inspire the inclusion of the places of cohabitation into the social realm and encourage social and political agency.

Brandon LaBelle in his book *Sonic Agency* inquires into the question of how subjectivity and social formations are supported by the listening sense and reflects on the “acoustics of social becoming” (LaBelle, 2018, 2). He is arguing that through auditory means, a sonic sensibility, it

becomes possible to nurture modes of engaged attention, for listening is often relating us to the depths of others, and which may extend across bodies and things, persons and places: sound is a medium enabling animate contact that, in oscillating and vibrating over and through all types of bodies and things, produces complex ecologies of matter and energy, subjects and objects. (LaBelle, 2018, 7)

For LaBelle, listening or audition is experienced intensely in continuous agitation that reveals temporality, the ephemerality of the world, things, bodies. The changing, dynamic nature of sound also carries ambiguity, fluidity and in listening

demands a continuous work on discovering meaning, sense, anew. (LaBelle, 2018, 38) This understanding is parallel to Nancy's hearing of sound as liminal—always on the edge of sense. The latter is encountered intersubjectively, through reverberation, when sound as time is placed. In this way, place also can remain unmarked, understood as a subject on its own, allowed to be through its sound and breath.

In a similar manner both authors' voices relate in hearing reverberation and echo that allow for a multitude of senses, cohabiting in difference. "The echo, as a sound that expands according to the acoustical dynamics of a given space, can be heard as a proliferating multiplication—a splintering of the vector of sound into multiple events" (LaBelle, 2019, 28).

Voegelin's presentation of phenomenology of sound art also relates to this when she writes about semantic materiality of soundscapes that are intersubjectively constituted in their encounter. This engagement, generative participation, or phenomenological inhabiting of a life-world leads to a "semantic inhabiting" of the listening subject, "who *is* through his being in the world and the world is through her being in it" (Voegelin, 2014, 36). This again opens a myriad of possible ways to inhabit the world:

To hear the soundscape as a phenomenological possible world, a possible life-world, situated within a cross-referential universe of mutually accessible possible worlds actualized through my inhabiting in listening, recentering myself in their sound, has consequences for my sense of self and my understanding of truth, reality, and knowledge. (Voegelin, 2014, 33)

This is parallel to discovering sense and its liberation, exposed by LaBelle and Nancy, thus showing that philosophy, phenomenology of sound and acoustic ecology might as well point to a listening direction, sense, that could liberate the sense of the necessity of meaning and the senses of the listening subject, opening it to the life-world. The sense is therefore liberated in all its directions: sensual perception, dynamic directionality, impulse, meaning.

Because listening, for Nancy, is the sense that touches upon and stimulates at once all bodily senses, as well as that other sense-making faculty that has been variously called "mind," "spirit," or "soul," to listen is both to engage in proprioceptive self-reflection and to be drawn towards other sounding bodies whose resonances both penetrate and envelope the listener. It is to attend to resonances of perception and meaning yet to emerge and always passing away. (Janus, 2011, 189)

Listening to Nancy's philosophy of listening, or listening philosophy, can elicit a variety of senses, directions, which a listener could head towards, stretch her ear to. Relistening to the author through voices of ethics of listening, Husserl's intersubjec-

tivity, phenomenologies of sound and acoustic ecology one can identify more clearly the listening path to follow, in order to “let things be.”

## 5. *ECHOES AND REVERBERATIONS*

Drawing from perspectives of the ethics of listening that enables a welcoming encounter with the other as the unknown, of the listening subject being self-established and self-liberating in its sense(s), and of the intersubjectivity of the human condition that shows how connected and co-constitutive human beings are, philosophers, activists, decision makers could follow the echo of a call to “let things be,” to returning to “things themselves,” including in the realm of environmental issues. As fragmentarily shown in the previous pages, through listening to a valley, for example, one can simultaneously be constituted by its sound, its vibrations and reverberation, and at the same time constitute the valley in an intersubjective manner, letting it be and inhabit this life-world as itself, and, moreover, as the listening subject, liberate the sense of the sounding valley, allowing many possible senses for its adoption. This way of echoing the thoughts and voices of the presented scholars and artists, listeners, can allow for a sense to be found in listening to birds, trees, stones, water, fire, soil, air.

To adopt such a listening approach, one needs to be prepared to be changed, as Hempton claimed, and to be exposed in one’s own vulnerability, as Lipari warned. Also, we should understand with Voegelin (2014, 3) that listening in itself does not promise a better world; however, it enables one, encourages one, when revealing the world’s invisibility. On the other hand it can also be acknowledged, that in the liberation of sense about which we were able to learn through Nancy’s listening philosophy, there is something, of course, liberating, fluid, dynamic, that allows for a lighter subjectivity to emerge and to approach the unknown without presupposed meanings.

Listening, with its intersubjective constitution and also through enabling intersubjective co-constitution among listeners and the listened-to, allows for encounters in acceptance and an inhabitation of the world that can let things be.

Listening is inextricably linked to silence, as they are mutually conditioned and enabled as gestures, states, or activities. They are also related from an ethical point of view: “If there is an ethics for listening, then respect for silence must play a part in that ethics” (Ihde, 2007, 180). Silence is at the heart of ideal listening and speaking, a conversation between two—it is constitutive of listening and voice. “The deepest and most profound listening hears not only the voices of the world, it is a waiting that is also open to the possibilities of silence” (Ihde, 2007, 181). Ihde’s phenomenological account on silence as “space” of music (and sound) and also as “sheer potentiality”

(Ihde, 2007, 223) matches the offering of the (ethical) listening subject to the other for them to express the unexpected and the unknown, but also for the subject to be always becoming in its reverberation.

In silence I comprehend, physically, the idea of intersubjective listening: I am in the soundscape through my listening to it and in turn the soundscape is what I listen to, perpetually in the present. Silence confirms the soundscape as a sonic life-world, and clarifies the notion that sound is a relationship not between things but just a relationship, passing through my ears. (Voegelin, 2010, 83–84)

Also, it is through silence that intersubjectivity can be adopted in inhabiting the life-world and engaging with it through letting things be. “Silence is not the absence of something but *the presence of everything*” (Hempton & Grossmann, 2009, 14). Through acoustic ecology we could look further into the silence as an intersubjective space of letting things be—but these are sonorities for another movement.

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